

Final Report:

April 2007 – March 2008: Year 5 of 5



Presented to the
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
in support of the
Coteau Legacy Conservation Plan



submitted by:

Ducks Unlimited Canada

and

Ducks Unlimited Inc.

May 2008



Contents

	Page
Funding and Partnerships.....	2
Target Area.....	3
Waterfowl and Habitat.....	4
Trends and Challenges.....	5
Program Accomplishments.....	6
Program Accomplishments.....	7
Five-Year Accomplishments.....	8
Our continued Partnership.....	9

Funding and Partnerships:




The Missouri Coteau remains one of the critical areas of focus for Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC). Since 2004 DU and LDWF have been partners in the Coteau Legacy Program, a concerted effort to conserve some of the best breeding habitat for waterfowl in North America. In 2007, generous program funding from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) advanced the Coteau Legacy program towards its conservation goals for this significant waterfowl landscape. LDWF funds were leveraged six times through strong ongoing relationships between various conservation partners in Canada and the United States through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). State agency and DU Inc. funds, in conjunction with U.S. federal funding through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), has



helped accelerate the efforts of DUC to conserve and restore valuable acres of wetland and upland habitat. Under the Coteau Legacy, DUC has protected existing habitats, improved ecological function to support breeding success and compensated for on going loss of habitat. The securement, enhancement and technical assistance components of program delivery play an integral role in long-term waterfowl population recovery.

This report highlights DUC's program and partnership successes within the Missouri Coteau during the period April 1, 2007 through to March 31, 2008 (FY08). DUC wishes to acknowledge the continued generous financial support of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, during this, the 5th year of the 5-year program funding agreement.

Missouri Coteau – FY 2008



REVENUE	US/Cdn \$
LDWF	225,314
DU Inc.	225,314
NAWCA	450,628
Other Contributions	530,220
Totals	1,431,476

As in the past, Ducks Unlimited matches LDWF's contribution, couples it with other non-federal partner funds and ensures that the combined amount is matched with federal funds under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. A Canadian partner commitment of an additional 25% from DUC, Canadian Federal and Provincial governments and other NGO's is applied as per the NAWMP.

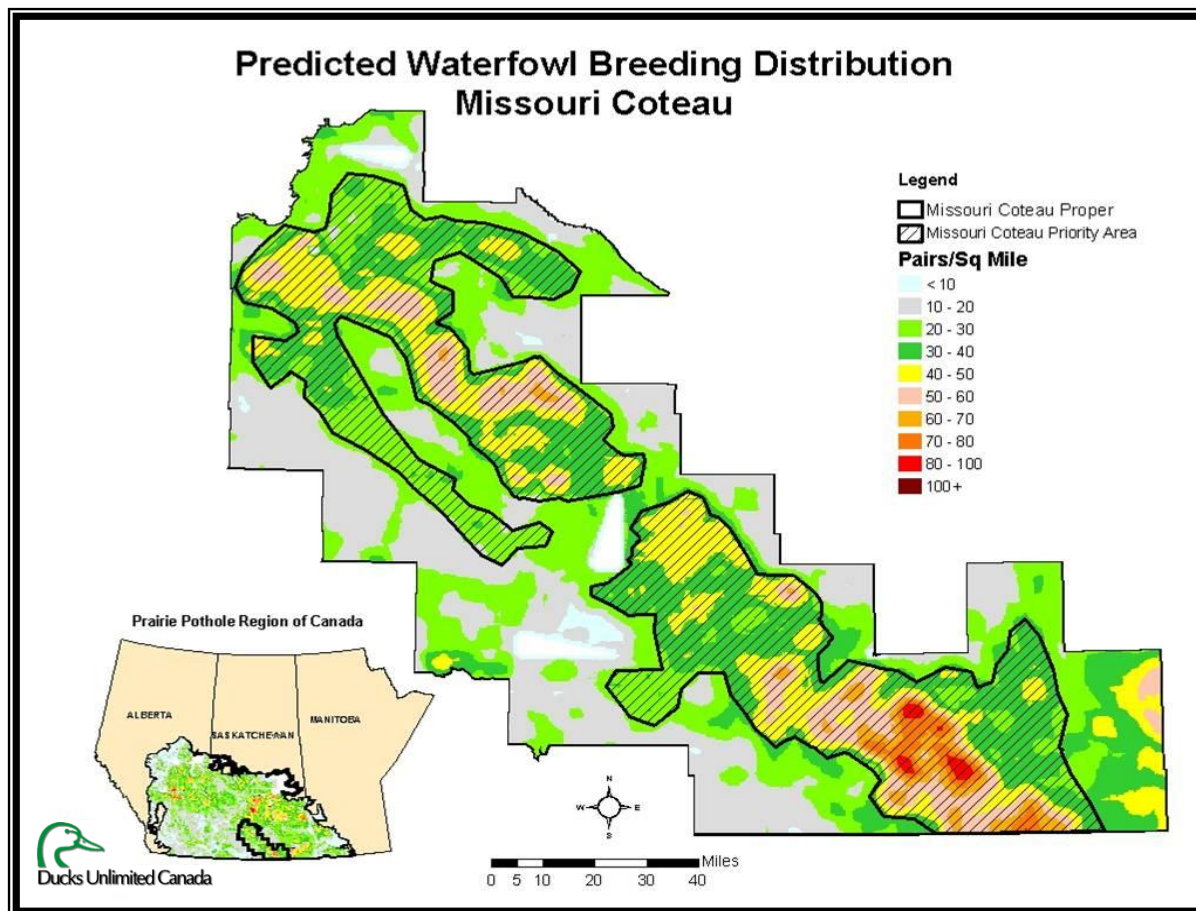
Target Area: Missouri Coteau “Hills of the Prairie”



Coteau Diversity

At the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is the Missouri Coteau. This 25,700 mile² band of recessional moraine is 10 to 50 miles wide and stretches from Saskatchewan southeast into Montana, North and South Dakota. The Missouri Coteau is a broken escarpment characterized by gently rolling to rugged hills that creates high wetland densities. During wet years these highly productive prairie wetlands in concert with an abundance of native grassland collectively contribute to some of the very best waterfowl habitat in North America. The Missouri Coteau is a last vestige of the prairie and potholes that once dominated the PPR.

Waterfowl values of the Coteau are as high as 80 to 100 predicted breeding pairs per square mile based on average habitat conditions. During wet years breeding densities can exceed 150 pairs or 300 ducks per square mile. The frequency of drought and dynamic changes within the wetlands of the Coteau creates highly productive habitat for breeding waterfowl. Attractive to breeding mallards, gadwall, blue wing teal and northern shoveler, the Coteau also supports some of the highest breeding densities of pintails in the Prairies.



Waterfowl and Habitat: 2007 - 2008 Conditions



The Province of Saskatchewan experienced above average spring pond conditions in 2007, due to a good fall frost seal and average snow accumulations. Provincially, pond numbers were 52% above the long-term average with more than three million ponds. Spring pond numbers in Stratum 32 (survey area of USFWS), which covers all of the short grass prairies in Saskatchewan, were 20% above the long-term average. However generally drier conditions prevailed across the southern portion of this stratum including much of the Missouri Coteau.

In the spring of 2007, stratum 32 attracted an estimated 3.8 million waterfowl. Fifteen species of waterfowl were recorded on the May 2007 breeding survey of Stratum 32. The third year of a brood survey coordinated by CWS was conducted by a number of Canadian partners and indicated a strong breeding effort for 2007 in the PPR of Canada. Due to very good wetland conditions in the northern coteau and parklands there was a strong hatch bolstering mid continent waterfowl populations.



The Burtnick conservation easement project in the central part of the Missouri Coteau represents the type of habitat targeted for permanent protection in this landscape.

Trends and Challenges: Agriculture and Policy FY 2008



AGRICULTURE OUTLOOK

FY2008 was a year of volatility and change in Canadian Prairie Agriculture. In recent years the cattle industry has been more profitable than the grain industry. This has led to large acreages of cultivated land being converted to perennial cover through government programs such as Greencover Canada, DUC's forage programs and also by individual producers without additional financial incentives. In many areas important to waterfowl, land in pasture or hay was actually priced higher than cultivated land. This has been positive for waterfowl because perennial grasslands provide improved habitat as compared to spring-seeded cropland. Also, there is a lower risk of wetland drainage in land that is in perennial cover.

Canada and other countries produced a smaller than average cereal crop in 2007. This in combination with higher consumption worldwide has produced a dramatic increase in commodity prices since last fall. As a result, the cattle producer is being pressured on a number of fronts causing some conversion of grasslands back to cultivation.

On a positive note, winter wheat seeded acreage continues to grow annually with 1.5 million acres seeded in fall 2007. Winter wheat has not only caught the attention of producers, but also agribusiness. Two of the major grain handling companies aggressively promoted winter wheat over the past year in cooperation with DUC.



POLICY ADVANCEMENTS

Federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers of Agriculture are in the process of developing *Growing Forward*, Canada's new policy framework for agriculture. Ministers are committed to having a final agreement framework in place for *Growing Forward* by their annual conference in July 2008.

Although the final Greencover Canada forage conversion numbers are not yet known, as of December 31, 2007 just over 540,000 acres had been converted to forage, the vast majority in the PPR, and hence provides a significant benefit to waterfowl.

In March 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the Natural Areas Conservation (NAC) Program, which will see the conservation of 500,000 acres of ecologically significant lands across southern Canada. The NAC Program led by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and DUC, is designed to accelerate and increase the volume of private land conservation, specifically the acquisition of lands, conservation easements, development rights, and other interests in land. This investment demonstrates a commitment to conserve Canada's natural areas by the Canadian Federal Government.



Program Accomplishments: Conservation Easements and Winter Wheat



Consistent with the three primary goals of the “Coteau Legacy Conservation Plan” (Protection, Improved Function and Compensation) as indicated in the **FY2009-13 proposal** to LDWF, conservation funding from states and other sources were pooled to provide maximum impact on the landscape.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS - 124% of GOAL

Great success was achieved with the Conservation Easement (CE) program in the Missouri Coteau for FY 2008. In total 35 land parcels are under agreement with nine individual landowners to protect 3720.6 acres. This includes 272 separate wetlands adding up to 414.5 acres. The remaining 3306.1 acres of uplands were >90% native prairie. The protection of existing grasslands in the Coteau is a top priority and it is rewarding to see this level of accomplishment. The total cost of the CE delivery program for

FY2008 was \$415,000 (\$111.50/acre) not including annual monitoring and management costs.

WINTER WHEAT - 477% of Goal

Seeded acreage of winter wheat in western Canada grew another 25% this past year. Agriculture Canada estimated total seeded acreage of 1.5 million acres in Prairie Canada in the fall of 2007. Seeded acreage in Saskatchewan grew by 70,000 acres over 2006, representing a 13% increase. It is estimated that roughly 35,000 acres of Saskatchewan’s winter wheat crop is located in the Missouri Coteau. Of this acreage, 17,581 acres were under agreement with DUC. The highly successful plant breeding program sponsored by DUC influenced the planting of nearly all winter wheat in Prairie Canada. The minimum waterfowl benefit derived from the winter wheat crop in Prairie Canada is estimated at 37,500 hatched nests.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS – FY 2008 (current year)

Goal	Acre Goals	Actual Acres	Costs \$	% Accomplished
Protection	3,000	6,557	844,778	219
Improved Ecological Function	233,000	213,594	242,945	95
Compensation	18,500	46,935	343,753	254
Total	254,500	267,086	1,431,476	105

* As ranchers adopt conservation practices resulting from rangeland extension, measuring accomplishments is compiled for both influenced acres and acres under an extension agreement.

Program Accomplishments: FY 2008



“Coteau Legacy Plan” FY 2008

Conservation Goals/Programs	Direct Program (Acres) ¹	Extension Program (Acres) ²	FY08 Total (Acres)	FY08 Total Cost
Protection of Existing Habitat				
Land Purchase	317.5	-	317.5	76,986
Conservation Easements	3720.6	-	3720.6	414,833
Conservation Agreements	2518.8	-	2518.8	16,337
Habitat Management ³	-	-	397,600 ³	336,622
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>6556.9</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>6556.9</i>	<i>844,778</i>
Improved Ecological Function				
Grazing Extension ⁴	-	200,000 ⁴	200,000	191,625
Grazing Agreements	13,594.4	-	13,594.4	51,320
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>13,594.4</i>	<i>200,000</i>	<i>213,594.4</i>	<i>242,945</i>
Compensate for Lost Habitats				
Conservation Forages	6354	-	6354	212,735
Winter Cereals	17,581	23,000	40,581	107,682
Planted Cover	-	-	525	23,336
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>23,935</i>	<i>23,000</i>	<i>46,935</i>	<i>343,753</i>
Total	44,086.3	223,000	267,086.3	1,431,476

¹ Direct program – Programs whereby DUC directly impacts actions of producers, improves, or protects habitat.

² Extension program – Programs whereby DUC extends technical advice mutually beneficial to producers and waterfowl habitat.

³ Habitat Management - These acres include the existing projects requiring annual management to maintain healthy habitats. The acres in this category are not included in the total of habitat accomplishments.

⁴ Acres based on entire holdings of producers involved in extension activities.

Five-Year Accomplishments: 2004 - 2008



The growth of waterfowl populations wintering in Louisiana hinges on the productivity of the Canadian breeding grounds. Under wet conditions, breeding densities in the Missouri Coteau can exceed 150 pairs or 300 ducks per square mile which contributes significantly to North American waterfowl production. During the term of this 5-year contract, DUC's conservation efforts in the Missouri Coteau were outstanding and resulted in 114% of the 5-year goals being accomplished. The generous contribution of LDWF through its partnership with DUC will ensure that waterfowl production on the Canadian Prairies continues well into the future.

PROGRESS TOWARD 5 – Year Goals

Program	5 Year Goals	5 Year Total	% Accomplished
Paid Perpetual Easements	10,910	20,453	187%
Tax Credit Programs	249,767	240,673	96%
Land Purchase	1,760	895	51%
Land Leasing	-	1256	-
Grazing Extension	1,049,000	1,159,200	111%
Stock Watering	-	3450	-
Grazing Agreements	10,000	34,766	348%
Government Pastures	66,825	65,828	99%
Conservation Forages	32,330	24,984	77%
Winter Cereals	44,700	117,982	264%
Total	1,465,292	1,669,516	114%

LDWF's significant contributions to DU in partnership with others have contributed to the securement (minimum 10 year agreement) of 171,607 acres of habitat over the past 5 years in landscapes that support a minimum average of 40 pairs of breeding ducks per square mile. The impact is even greater through influence on the management and stewardship of the remaining 1,497,909 acres of habitat.

Our Continued Partnership:



The future holds many challenges and opportunities for waterfowl conservation in Prairie Canada and the Missouri Coteau. DUC continues to be involved in stakeholder consultations in the development of “Growing Forward”, Canada’s Federal farm policy and will be providing it’s recommendations on program components throughout the year. Natural Areas Conservation (NAC) funding was initiated this past year and is scheduled to continue over the next 3 to 5 years, thus further leveraging the impact of future LDWF partner funding.

The next 3-5 years could be challenging for the Canadian conservation community given the improved economics of annual crop production. However, DUC has succeeded when faced with similar challenges during its 70 year history and remains confident that future program goals will be achieved.



The results of inaction on the Canadian Prairies mean that critical waterfowl habitat will continue to be lost in the top waterfowl production area of North America. For every wetland and grassland acre that DUC doesn’t protect or restore, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan goal slips further away. The waterfowl community continues to recognize habitat programs as the primary solution to waterfowl recovery. If approved, Ducks Unlimited Canada will focus future LDWF funding on habitat programs. Louisiana’s waterfowl hunters can have the biggest impact on waterfowl production by investing in the successful habitat programs delivered by Ducks Unlimited Canada in the Missouri Coteau and the Saskatchewan Prairies